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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7366
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INFO RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY 0495
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RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUFDNBS/CDRUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE PRIORITY
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSNAVEUR NAPLES IT PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUFGSHD/USNMR SHAPE BE PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0186
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUFOAOA/USNIC SARAJEVO PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SARAJEVO 002448

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FROM AMBASSADOR ENGLISH FOR A/S FRIED AND U/S EDELMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR MARR BK
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - KEEPING THE US FLAG ON NATO HQ SARAJEVO

REF: A. SARAJEVO 1980
 1B. USNATO 599

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C/NF) Earlier this year, my predecessor concluded that it remained critical to U.S. objectives in Bosnia for a U.S. general officer to command NATO HQ Sarajevo (Ref A). After careful review, I have now reached the same conclusion. I am writing to ask you to reconsider the decision not to retain a U.S. general officer beyond spring 2008, and to request an extension of the U.S. presence for a further year, to April 12009.

12. (C/NF) My first month in Sarajevo has been marked by the country's most serious political crisis since Dayton. The leadership of the Republika Srpska (RS) has challenged the authority of the High Representative, and by extension Dayton, effectively calling into question Bosnia's viability as a state. Bosnian Serb leaders, with overt backing from Belgrade, have publicly linked the RS's future to Kosovo's, suggesting independence for the later could justify the same for the former. Russia is also attempting to destabilize Bosnia by encouraging RS political leaders. The importance of a visible U.S. role promoting stability, including through our traditional leadership of NATO's presence here, has never been greater.

3 (C/NF) Removing the U.S. general officer at NATO HQ would reduce our ability to influence events on the ground and manage the current political crisis, which given political trends over the last 18 months, could extend well into next year. It would send a counter productive signal about the U.S. commitment to Bosnia just as the Dayton Peace Accords faced their most significant challenge in 12 years. It would also limit our capacity to shape developments over the next 15 months, which are likely to determine whether Bosnia's current problems become chronic, putting at risk broader U.S. strategic interests in Europe.

¶4. (C/NF) Our core objective in Bosnia since Dayton has been to lock Bosnia onto a self-sustaining path towards Euro-Atlantic integration, using the institutional framework provided by NATO and EU to tame, once and for all, the country's centrifugal ethnic divisions. The EU train may now be off the tracks, possibly for a year. Events of the last 18 months have called into question whether the prospect of EU membership is enough to overcome Bosnia's still deep ethnically-based political differences and ensure reform here is self-generating, and frankly, they have raised questions about Europe's ability to lead in Bosnia. This makes keeping Bosnia on the NATO track even more important to U.S. objectives here.

¶5. (C/NF) The creation of a single, multi-ethnic Armed Forces from the three former warring armies has been a U.S.-led and resourced project. High-level U.S. leadership on defense reform, both bilaterally and through our command of NATO HQ Sarajevo, laid the foundation for Bosnia's invitation to join the Partnership for Peace and its participation in the Multinational Force in Iraq. Finishing defense reform is critical if Bosnia is to take its next steps towards NATO membership and we are to advance our longer-term goal of locking Bosnia into Euro-Atlantic structures. The success of this project depends on U.S. leadership at NATO Sarajevo. Removing the U.S. flag from NATO HQ would put defense reform at risk.

¶6. (C/NF) Over the past twelve years the U.S. has made a substantial investment in Bosnia. These investments have been critical to securing our interests here, in the Western Balkans region, and more broadly, in building a Europe whole, free, prosperous and at peace. It will be more difficult to advance our interests without a U.S. general officer commanding NATO HQ in Sarajevo. Given Bosnia's current political trajectory and the European's inability to drive reform, we could even see a roll back of some of our progress on defense reform without continued, high-level U.S. leadership. I would urge that a U.S. general officer remain commander at NATO HQ Sarajevo, at least until April 2009.

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